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## Kṣatriyas in the Kali Age? Gāgābhaṭṭa & His Opponents

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### Abstract

This paper deals with the history of the disputes regarding the Kṣatriya status of the local ruler Shivaji and the Cāndrasenīya Kāyastha Prabhu (CKP) community of Maharashtra. The origin of these disputes lies in the wider dispute concerning whether there are any true Kṣatriyas in the Kali age. The CKPs of Maharashtra claimed to be Kṣatriyas and thus entitled for the rite of Upanayana, while the dominant regional Brahmin opinion was that they were Śūdras and not entitled for the Upanayana. The dispute broke out a few years before Shivaji's coronation, and to the discomfort of the local Brahmins, Gāgābhaṭṭa of Banaras settled it in favor of the Kāyasthas in his work, the *Kāyasthadharmadīpa*. In decades after Shivaji's death, the dispute broke out again, and within Maharashtra, gradually the Dharmaśāstric opinion shifted against the views of Gāgābhaṭṭa, and toward the end of the rule of the last Peshwa, this dispute was raised again by Nilakaṇṭha Śāstri Thatte in Pune against the Kāyasthas. I have traced the lineage of Nilakaṇṭha Thatte, through his teacher Vaidyanātha Pāyaguṇḍe, to his teacher, the great Nāgeśabhaṭṭa of Banaras. Nāgeśabhaṭṭa produced his *Vrātyatāprāyaścittanirmaya* at a śāstrasabhā in Jaipur, where he argued that there were no pure Kṣatriyas surviving in the Kali age, and that the impure ones do not have the eligibility for Upanayana through some expiation. So the Kāyasthas could not claim to be genuine Kṣatriyas either. It was this opinion of Nāgeśabhaṭṭa, counter to the opinion of Gāgābhaṭṭa, that steadily gained popularity among the Pune Brahmins during the rule of the Peshwas, finally reflected in the activities of Nilakaṇṭha Thatte.

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### Keywords

Dharmaśāstra, Gāgābhaṭṭa, Nāgeśabhaṭṭa, Vaidyanātha, Nilakaṇṭha Śāstri Thatte, Shivaji, Peshwas, Kṣatriya, Cāndrasenīya Kāyastha Prabhu, Śūdra, caste disputes

## Background of the Debate

In the seventeenth century Maharashtra, two related disputes seem to have emerged, both going back to a common root: Were there communities and/or individuals present at this time who were genuinely qualified to be treated as Kṣatriyas in terms of the categories of the Hindu Dharmaśāstra? Whether or not one was a Kṣatriya in Dharmaśāstric terms did not prevent one from becoming a *de facto* ruler (*rājā*), but it could prevent one from undergoing a proper royal consecration ceremony (*abhiṣeka*), a goal that was not sought by many *de facto* rulers for several previous centuries. The other consequence of not being considered a true Kṣatriya may include ineligibility for the initiation rite of Upanayana, the sacred thread ceremony, which ritually admitted a young male into the three higher orders of the Hindu society, namely Brahmins, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas. This rite entitled a person to engage in religious ceremonies using the proper Vedic mantras, learn the Vedas, etc. Again, we do not hear about any major contestations from communities or individuals on this issue before the seventeenth century. Among the disputes that emerge in the seventeenth century Maharashtra in this regard are i) the genuine Kṣatriyahood of Shivāji, an emerging warrior chief who wanted the ceremony of royal consecration for himself to establish himself as a dharmically proper Hindu king, and ii) the eligibility of the Cāndrasenīya Kāyastha Prabhu community of Maharashtra for the initiatory rite of Upanayana.

There was an established pattern of either sending the locally unresolved Dharmaśāstric disputes to authoritative centers of Brahmanical learning like Paithan or Banaras for resolution, or inviting authoritative persons from such centers of learning to the region to resolve the local disputes. We have a number of such decision-documents relating to disputes in the Maharashtrian communities going back to the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, and this pattern continues into the subsequent periods until the coming of the British colonial rule. The authority figure that emerges into prominence in resolving some of these disputes is the person of Viśveśvara Paṇḍita, more popularly known by the name of Gāgābhaṭṭa. As documented in the *Śyenavījātidharmanirṇaya*, Gāgābhaṭṭa led a committee of scholars invited by Shivaji's court around 1664 AD to resolve a dispute over the full Brahminhood of the community of the Śyenavis, later known as the Sārasvata Brahmins of the coastal regions of Maharashtra, including Goa. In arguing for the full Brahminhood of the Śyenavis, contested by the other local Brahmins, Gāgābhaṭṭa and his colleagues used evidence from the tra-

ditional Dharmaśāstric and Purāṇic materials, and arguing on the basis of implications of narratives in these works, they reached their conclusions. In reaching their conclusions based on these Purāṇic narratives, the pandits were essentially trying to open new spaces by reading between the lines of the narratives, and the final verdicts became authoritative not so much by the strength of the arguments, but by the perceived authority of the persons rendering these verdicts. Such verdicts, though accepted by the communities at a given time and place were eventually subject to dispute and repudiation, if the perceived authority of the verdict-givers eroded by the emergence of new circumstances.

### Two Principal Disputes in the 17th Century Maharashtra

The main disputes that emerged around 1674 AD were the eligibility of Shivaji for a royal consecration ceremony and the eligibility of the Cāndraseniya Kāyastha Prabhus to have an Upanayana. Both of these questions are intricately related to each other. The very basic question was whether there were any true Kṣatriyas alive during the Kali age. The questions were prompted by the Purāṇic story of the sage Paraśurāma having killed in revenge all the Kṣatriyas on the earth twenty-one times, and by the Purāṇic narratives that claimed that there will be no Kṣatriya dynasties after the Nandas [*nandāntaṃ kṣatriyakulam*], the precursors of the Mauryas in the 3rd century BC [*tataḥ prabhṛti śūdrā bhūpālā bhaviṣyanti*, *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa*, 4.24.21; also *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa*, 12.1.8–10]. These stories were widely interpreted by the authors on the Dharmaśāstra to suggest that there were only two Varṇas left in the Kali-age, the Brahmins and the Śūdras. Everyone other than Brahmins is a Śūdra [*kalāv ādyantayoḥ sthitiḥ*, quoted in Kamalākaraḥṭṭa's *Śūdrakamalākara*]. This situation becomes further complicated by a possible implication, equally contested in the sources, that the Kṣatriyas physically survived in the Kali age, but by non-performance of their initiation for generations [*patitasāvitrika*], they reached a Śūdra-like state. Total non-existence of the Kṣatriyas was one alternative, while the existence of the Śūdra-like fallen Kṣatriyas was the other alternative. Assuming that there are such fallen Śūdra-like Kṣatriyas, is there a possible restitution [*śuddhi*] for them to their pure Kṣatriya status, through performance of some expiation [*prāyaścitta*, *vrātyastoma*]? Here too, some authorities claimed that there is no such restitution, while others claimed that such restitution is possible.

### Gāgābhaṭṭa's Views Prior to Shivaji's Coronation

Looking at all the documentary evidence available to us, we can assert the following about what Gāgābhaṭṭa achieved. From his preamble to the *Śyēnavijātidharmanirṇaya*, composed ten years before Shivaji's coronation in 1674AD, it is clear that Gāgābhaṭṭa accepts Shivaji's father Shahaji as someone born in a pure royal family [*vimala-rāja-kula*], and he glorifies Shivaji's achievements against the Mughals of Delhi, and addresses him as Shivaji-Rājā. While this does not touch the Dharmaśāstric question, it shows Gāgābhaṭṭa's acceptance of Shivaji both as a person born in a "pure royal family" and as a *de facto* Rājā "king", ten years before the question of his eligibility for the consecration ceremony was raised.<sup>1</sup> While none of the texts composed by Gāgābhaṭṭa that are available to us explicitly discuss the issues involved in how he decided the question of Shivaji's authentic Kṣatriyahood, the surviving text of the *Rājyābhiṣekapaddhati* "Procedure for the Royal Consecration" composed by Gāgābhaṭṭa on the occasion of Shivaji's royal consecration includes Vedic mantras, and hence one must conclude that by the time of the actual royal consecration, Shivaji was deemed to be completely eligible to be treated as a full Kṣatriya.<sup>2</sup> While the text of the *Rājyābhiṣekapaddhati* does not tell us that Gāgābhaṭṭa made Shivaji to undergo a purificatory rite, the received reports from other sources do indicate this purificatory rite, and the fact that Shivaji underwent the ceremony of Upanayana, and then his queens were dharmically remarried to him. This would suggest that Gāgābhaṭṭa accepted the following premises:

<sup>1</sup> In his *Mīmāṃsā* work *Śivārkodaya*, Gāgābhaṭṭa says that he composed this work by the *ājñā* "order, command, behest" of Śiva (= Śivaji) who is further described as being the Lord of the Earth (*bhūmipati*), B.K. Apte (1974–1975: 90). We do not know when exactly this work was composed. However, it again shows at least that Gāgābhaṭṭa accepted the *de facto* royal status of Śivaji at the time of writing this work.

<sup>2</sup> Gāgābhaṭṭa was not alone in composing a procedure-text like the *Rājyābhiṣekapaddhati*. His uncle Kamalākaraḥṭṭa also composed a similar text, *Rājyābhiṣekaprayoga*, a copy of which is found at the BORI (manuscript 404/1891–1895). A work by the title *Rājyābhiṣekapaddhati* was composed by Raghunātha (BORI manuscript 297/1887–1891), and Gāgābhaṭṭa's contemporary, and a person regarded as an authority by the court of Shivaji, Anantadeva, composed the *Rājadharmakaustubha* (Gaekwad's Oriental Series, Baroda, 1935), and this work contains elaborate descriptions of the ceremony of royal coronation. While we have no explicit statements from these other authorities that they prescribed any sort of expiatory rites for the not-so-pure Kṣatriyas, their very activity of composing these texts may have given Gāgābhaṭṭa some ideas about how to make such a coronation into reality.

1. Kṣatriyas did survive after the attempts to exterminate them by Paraśurāma as well after the rule of the Nandas.
2. Through non-performance of the initiation (*upanayana*) rites for generations, these Kṣatriyas reached a Śūdra-like (*vrātya* / *patitasāvitrika*) status.
3. Through the performance of proper purificatory rites, a Vrātya Kṣatriya can be reinstated to the status of a pure Kṣatriya and become eligible for Vedic rites like Upanayana and royal consecration (*abhiṣeka*).

### Gāgābhaṭṭa on the Status of the Cāndraseniya Kāyastha Prabhus

In relation to the status of the Cāndraseniya Kāyastha Prabhus, Gāgābhaṭṭa partially validated their claim to Kṣatriyahood. His *Kāyasthadharmadīpa* takes recourse to the Purāṇic story about the origin of the CKPs. It distinguishes between three types of Kāyasthas: Citragupta or Brahmakāyastha, Saṃkārāja Kāyastha [Kāyastha born out of a mixture of Varṇas], and the Cāndraseniya Kāyasthas. In relation to the last category, the following explanation is offered. When Paraśurāma was killing all Kṣatriyas on earth in revenge, the pregnant queen of the king Candrasena took shelter in the hermitage of the sage Dālbhya. In pursuit, when Paraśurāma arrived at Dālbhya's hermitage, he was pleased with Dālbhya's hospitality, and offered Dālbhya a boon. Dālbhya requested that the life of the unborn child of the queen of Candrasena who had taken shelter in his hermitage be spared. Paraśurāma agreed to save the child on the condition that the child, though a born Kṣatriya, must not do the function of a Kṣatriya. This is how the CKPs became accountants, even though they claimed a Kṣatriya birth. Gāgābhaṭṭa allowed them the ceremony of Upanayana, only as a rite of passage (*saṃskāra*), but did not allow them the study of the Veda. This fine print is lost in most of the debate, and the popular opinion is that Gāgābhaṭṭa fully accepted the Kṣatriyahood of the CKPs and allowed their Upanayana. Ultimately, the story of the CKPs also rests on the assumption that at least some Kṣatriyas survived in the Kali age, and that they can undergo purificatory rites and be reinstated to their proper caste status. In the days of Shivaji, the local Brahmins, and especially some of Shivaji's Brahmin ministers like Moropant Pingle, were against this view. Gāgābhaṭṭa's status as the leading scholar from Banaras made his views carry the day for a few decades. The documents from Shivaji's court list Anantadeva along with Gāgābhaṭṭa as authorities who resolved this dispute.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>) There is a letter sent out by Raghunātha Paṇḍita, a minister of Shivaji, to the CKPs

The CKP dispute at Shivaji's court appears to have arisen before the dispute regarding Shivaji's own eligibility for royal coronation. It was Balaji Avaji Chitnis,<sup>4</sup> a CKP, who assisted Shivaji's search for his Rajput Kṣatriya roots by sending investigators to the north (cf. Shejwalkar 1964: 477; *Śrīśivadigvijaya*, pp. 249 ff.), and, according to the *Citṇis-Bakhar*, it was Balaji Avaji who suggested to Shivaji that he invite Gāgābhaṭṭa in connection with the coronation. Therefore, it is very likely that, though the Śāstric Nirṇaya about the status of the CKPs was rendered by Gāgābhaṭṭa, Shivaji's own predilection in the matter is also visible in the documents.<sup>5</sup>

### Predicament of the Cāndraseniya Kāyastha Prabhu's after Shivaji

Other Brahmins were not so sympathetic to the cause of the CKPs in later times. A series of documents from the Satara court of Shahu, Shivaji's grandson, reveal how the issue erupted and, in spite of Shahu's sympathy in favor of the CKPs, was for a while resolved against them under the pressure of a massive demonstration by the Brahmins of Pune, Vai, and Satara. With ten thousand Brahmins converging upon Satara, including representatives of Brahmins from Shringeri and Varanasi, the mass Śāstrasabhā decided the issue against the CKPs. Here the documents refer to the story of Dālbhya,

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that refers to Anantadeva and Gāgābhaṭṭa and says that these great scholars had resolved the question of the Kṣatriyahood of the CKPs and their eligibility for Upanayana, cf. T.V. Gupte (1912: Appendix II, p. 12).

<sup>4</sup> Gupte (1919, pp. 6–7) reports that the question of the Vedic rites for the CKPs began with Balaji Avaji's desire to have the *upanayana* ceremony performed for his elder son in Śake 1591 (1669 AD). However, Shivaji's Brahmin ministers Moropant Pingle and Raghunathpant Amatya opposed this notion. Shivaji then sent this dispute to Anantadeva and Gāgābhaṭṭa in Banaras. In the CKP documents, including the *Citṇis Bakhar*, the role of Bālājī Āvaji is somewhat exaggerated. It is not clear how much convincing Gāgābhaṭṭa needed from Bālājī Āvaji. The *Sabhasad Bakhar* attributes the initiative regarding coronation to Gāgābhaṭṭa himself. If the date of the *Śyēnavijātidharmanirṇaya* of 1664 AD is valid, then Shivaji was already in touch with Gāgābhaṭṭa in such Dharmasāstric matters, and it seems natural that he would have sent such disputes to the same authorities. On Balaji Avaji's role in seeking validation of Shivaji's Kṣatriyahood, see: *Śrīśivadigvijaya*, pp. 249 ff., Gupte (1919, pp. 52 ff.). On the opposition of the local Brahmins to Shivaji's coronation, see Shejwalkar 1977, p. 226. Also see Shejwalkar 1964, pp. 479 ff. for the specific documentation regarding the dispute about Shivaji's eligibility for coronation and how Gāgābhaṭṭa resolved it.

<sup>5</sup> Shivaji's trust in and affection for Balaji Avaji Chitnis is recorded in several sources, cf. *Śrīśivadigvijaya*, pp. 249 ff.; Gupte 1919; but for a more cautious assessment, see Shejwalkar 1964, pp. 386 ff. For an important *ājñāpātra* dated to 1674 AD by Shivaji addressed to Balaji Avaji, see: P.N. Deshpande 1983: 159.

but with a new twist. The CKPs are made out to be the sons of a Dāsī of Dālbhya, and hence clearly belonging to the status of Śūdras. The Karhada Brahmin, Mr. Athalye, who sided with the CKPs and represented their case at the court of Shahu, was forced to undergo a *prāyaścitta* “expiation” and admit his mistake.<sup>6</sup> Referring to a number of such antecedents, Sawai Madhavrao Peshwa issued a stiff set of conditions on the behavior of the CKPs to which they were forced to agree in writing (*katabā lihūn dilā*):<sup>7</sup>

We shall not perform any of our rites with Vedic mantras.  
 Even if known, we will not utter the Vedic mantras.  
 We will not make rice *piṇḍas* during the śrāddha.  
 We will carry out the worship of Devī and other rites as per the Purāṇas.  
 We will not invite Brahmins for a meal in our homes.  
 We will not do śaligrāma-pūjā.  
 We will worship only at those shrines where the Śūdras worship.  
 We will say *daṇḍavat* to Brahmins.  
 We will not employ Brahmin men and women as servants inside or outside of our homes.

The surviving historical documents indicate to us the political-executive power that the Sawai Madhavrao Peshwa put behind this decision. Vad (1911, 287 ff.) not only provides the text of the order issued by the Sawai Madhavrao Peshwa, he also gives a long list of 196 names of individuals and localities to whom copies of this order were sent and these individuals were advised that any violations of this order would lead to stiff penalties. Without the backing of the executive authority of the Peshwa, the Nirṇayapatra would have remained ineffective. Religious authorities like the various Śaṅkarācāryas also issued Nirṇayapatras that began with a statement of the high standing of the office and ended with a stamp that reads *mahānuśāsanam varīvartī*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> P.N. Patwardhan, 1912: 93 ff. The first document relating to the court of Śahu is dated to Śake 1671 (1749 AD). The second document is an order imposing restrictions on the CKPs issued by Savai Madhavrao Peshwa. For documents relating to the continued disputes over the rights of the CKPs, see: Sardesai-Kulkarni-Kale 1933: 21–22, 59, V.T. Gune 1953: 338–340.

<sup>7</sup> Gupte (1919) includes a number of Nirṇayapatras relating to this dispute, though all of these side with the claims of the CKPs to Vedic rites. Without access to the originals of these documents, it is very difficult to assess their authenticity. This is the situation with most published and re-published documents.

<sup>8</sup> The beginning of an *ājñāpatra* issued by the Śaṅkarācārya of the Karavirapīṭha in 1913 AD in support of the CKPs (cited in Gupte 1919: 68) reads: *svastiśrīmatśamastasura-vṛndapūjītapādāravināśivapratibimbavaryaśrīmatparamahamṣaparivṛjākācāryapadavākya-*



### Multiple Conflicting Versions of Gāgābhaṭṭa's *Kāyasthadharmadīpa*

In subsequent disputes on the same issue, two versions of Gāgābhaṭṭa's work on the *Kāyasthas* seem to have appeared. As K.T. Gupte (1919) reports, the *Kāyasthadharmadīpa* became available in two versions at some point. The *Kāyasthadharmadīpa* known to Gupte prescribed non-Vedic rites for *Kāyasthas*, but then contained a statement that the *Cāndrasenīya Kāyastha Prabhus* were not to be treated as *Śūdras*, and that Vedic rites for them will be taught in another text, namely the *Kāyasthadharmapradīpa*:

*citruguptacāndrasenīyakāyasthayor vedoktamantrasahitāḥ kriyās tās tu matkṛta-kāyasthapradīpe draṣṭavyāḥ / atra tu kapilākṣīrapānenety ādīni kāyasthānām vedādhikāraṇiṣedhaparāṇi vākyaṇy uktāni tāni tu saṃkarajaparāṇi (iti) boddhyam / citruguptakāyasthacāndrasenīyakāyasthasaṃkarajakāyastha iti kāyasthapadasya jātitraye 'pi sattvāt kāyasthapadena bhramād dharmasaṃkaro bhavati / tata ādau asmin granthe saṃkarajakāyasthānām dharmakarmāṇy ucyaṇte / atha kāyasthadharmapradīpe citruguptacāndrasenīyayor dharmān vaksyāmi /<sup>9</sup>*

Both the texts are now ascribed to the same Gāgābhaṭṭa, whose authority could not be questioned so easily. One can read the details of the politics of the creation of competing texts and counter-texts in K.T. Gupte's (1919) scathing attack on the Marathi historian V.K. Rajwade who was deemed to have belittled the CKP claims. One needs to carefully go through the available manuscript material and its origin in order to fully understand what is going on. It seems likely that Gāgābhaṭṭa's original work did offer Vedic rites for the *Kāyastha Prabhus* of Maharashtra (as seen in the BORI ms of the *Kāyasthadharmadīpa*). Then someone produced a version of Gāgābhaṭṭa's work that treated all *Kāyasthas*, without exception, as *saṃkaraja Śūdras*,

*pramāṇapārāvāraparinayamanīyamāsanaprāñyāmapratyābhāradhyānadhāranāsamādhyast-āṃgayogānuṣṭhānaniṣṭhatapaścakravartyanādyavicchinnaḥ guruparamparāprāptaśaḍdarśanasa-msthāpanācāryavyākhyānasimhāsanaādhīśvarasakalanigamāgamasārahṛdayasāmkhyatrayapra-tīpādakasakalanāstīkamatochedapūrvakasakaladharmasaṃsthāpanaikadhurīṇavaidīkamār-gapravartakasavaratantrasvatantṛasīmahārājadhānīrīyaśṛṅgapuravarādhīśāśrīmadrājādhirāj-agurumaṇḍalācāryaśrīmacchaṃkarācāryānṛvayasamjātābhīnavapañcagamgātīravāsakamalak-iñjalkodbhavaśrīmadabhīnavavidyāśaṃkarabhāratīsvāmīkṛtāni śrībhāksapārivaracchātrānām anudinam edhamānabhavyajanakāni śrīmacchaṃkarārādhanāvasarīyanārāyaṇasmarā nāni / śrīgurubhaktiparāyaṇeṣu sakalaśīsyavṛndeśakalyāṇābhivardhakāśīḥ purahṣaram anuśā-sanīyam idam /*

<sup>9</sup> I have not found this passage in the *Kāyasthadharmadīpa* mss at the BORI (# 342/ 1887–1891). I have not found any reference to *Kāyasthadharmapradīpa* in the BORI mss.

and took away their Vedic rites.<sup>10</sup> At this point, a pro-CKP pandit inserted the above quoted statement into the text of that work, saying that the vedic rites for the CKPs will be treated in a separate supplementary work, namely the *Kāyasthadharmapradīpa*, and produced that version.<sup>11</sup> This seems to be a likely course of events, though one cannot be certain without checking all the available manuscript material and its origins.

### Emerging Oposition to Gāgābhaṭṭa's Views

While the high standing of “national” authorities like Gāgābhaṭṭa may have temporarily silenced the local voices, the local voices surfaced again and again, and at times clearly expressed their resentment of “outsiders” like Gāgābhaṭṭa dabbling in the local affairs. Historians like Shejwalkar (1964: 46) note that the Brahmins at the court of Shivaji were not as assertive,<sup>12</sup> as they seem to have become during the days of the Peshwas. The anti-CKP document dating to Śake 1671 (1749 AD) openly criticizes Gāgābhaṭṭa and says that his decision on performing *upanayana* for Shivaji was a mistake, and it calls it *amārga*:

<sup>10</sup> Several works on Dharmasāstra do not appear to specify the sub-types of the Kāyasthas and create an impression that all Kāyasthas are Śūdras. T.V. Gupte (1912: 4) refers to the text of *Jātiviveka*, which evidently did not distinguish such sub-types.

<sup>11</sup> There are textual indications that the *Kāyasthadharmapradīpa* as printed by Gupte (1919) is concocted by altering the text of the *Kāyasthadharmadīpa*. The benediction of the *Kāyasthadharmadīpa* reads:

*natvābhirakīśoraṃ coraṃ vidyudvadambudha(da?)prakhyam /  
kāyasthadharmadīpaṃ gāgābhaṭṭas tanoti līlātah //*

The benediction of the *Kāyasthadharmapradīpa* reads:

*natvābhirakīśoraṃ coraṃ vidyudvadambudhaprakhyam /  
kāyasthapradīpo 'yam gāgābhaṭṭas tanoti līlātah //*

Here the second line of the verse does not even scan metrically and is ungrammatical. It seems most likely that the *Kāyasthadharmapradīpa* is a slightly altered version of the *Kāyasthadharmadīpa*.

<sup>12</sup> Gupte (1919: 99) reports that the Brahmins of Maharashtra had excommunicated Gāgābhaṭṭa for approving the Kṣatriya status of Shivaji. In opposition to Gāgābhaṭṭa's opinion, Nānā Phadnavis, the Kārbhārī of the Peshwas allowed only a *Paurāṇika Upanayana* for the king of Satara (Gupte, 1919: 95–96).

*pahile vedasāstrasampanna kailāsavāsī gāgābhaṭṭa yāmṇī kṣetrisarmāms adhikāra rājyās vṛtabandha karūn gāitri-upadeśa karūn sthāpile te karma siddhis gele nāhī. donahī vamsāne nirmūḷa jāhāle. he pratyakṣa jānūn āmārgāne vartalyās sādhyā śrīkrpā nāhī.* (P.N. Patwardhan 1912: 96)

This statement from the Brahmins of the Peshwa period claims that Gāgābhaṭṭa was mistaken in treating Shivaji as a Kṣatriya and offering *upanayana* to him with the teaching of the Vedic Gāyatrī mantra, and that the non-dharmic coronation eventually resulted in both the branches of Shivaji's line drying up without (non-adopted) descendants. The same document also produces a twist on Gāgābhaṭṭa's Purāṇic narrative regarding the origin of the CKPs. According to Gāgābhaṭṭa, the original Cāndraseniya Kāyastha was the son of the king Candrasena, whose wife took shelter at the hermitage of the sage Dālbhya. Now, the document cited above claims that the original Kāyastha was the son of a maid (*dāsī*) of Dālbhya, and hence the CKPs were indeed Śūdras:

*mag parabhuṭi utpatti koṭhūn mhaṇon prascchā kelī tevḥā dālabhya ruṣī hote tyāce dāsīpāsūn tyāmsī utpatti tyāmsī adhikār konatec goṣṭicā nāhī. keval śūdrāpāsūn utpanna mhaṇūn parabhu he nāmābhīdhān yāprakāre vartamān āsatām ānyathā mārga padavī jar yāmsī dilī tar siddhis jāne kathīn.*

(document in P.N. Patwardhan 1912: 96)

Such statements shock the modern sensitivities in Maharashtra. However, they point to the extremes of the spectrum within which the dharmasāstric opinions oscillated. These instances demonstrate to us the dynamics of decision-making based on the Sanskritic tradition, that at once claimed to be timeless and universal, and yet at the same time was deeply entrenched in specific temporal, geographic, social and political environments, that continuously shifted and led to the emergence of a bewildering mass of conflicting opinions seen Sanskrit and vernacular documents. The Sanskrit documents are deeply rooted in the vernacular local reality, and can make full sense only within that local reality. The texts exist only in the forms in which they are produced and reproduced, and the production and reproduction of texts is at all times a highly motivated activity. The motivations, real or suspected, are often clearly referred to in the available Sanskrit and vernacular documents, including *dveṣabuddhi* “hatred” and *dravyalobha* “greed” among Brahmins and others, and ostracism and fear of various kinds of reprisals by the different parties. The Sanskrit-based knowledge was continuously created and negotiated within these complicated parameters.

### Nilakaṇṭha Śāstrī Thatte: Reversal of the Status of the CKPs

Chronologically speaking, the last most prominent person who gets involved in a furious debate and dispute on the status of the CKPs and others is the Pandit Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte (1750–1834AD) of the late Peshwa and early British period in Maharashtra. The accounts of Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte that we have fall into two opposite categories. One set of documents and analyses presents Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte as the main villain who, joining other villains, virulently opposed the status of the CKPs and Sonars in Maharashtra. Other sources, particularly relating to the tradition of Sanskrit grammar in Maharashtra, glorify Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte as being almost the new incarnation of the great grammarian Pāṇini. On the face of it, these two personas of Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte seem unrelated to each other, but I want to point out that they may be intrinsically related to each other.

Most of the information regarding Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte as a great grammarian comes from K.V. Abhyankar (1954: 25–29). Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte, as a bright young Brahmin from Pune, upon recommendation from the court justice Rāmaśāstrī Prabhuṇe, was sent to Banaras by the Peshwa for advanced education in Sanskrit. He is said to have studied with the great grammarian Vaidyanātha Pāyaguṇḍe (1690–1780AD), who was himself a direct disciple of the illustrious grammarian Nāgeśabhaṭṭa (1650–1730AD), a junior contemporary of the great Gāḍābhaṭṭa. The oral traditions from Banaras report that Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte engaged in a serious debate on grammatical topics with his teacher Vaidyanātha Pāyaguṇḍe, and the pleased teacher called him an incarnation of Pāṇini. He was highly respected at the Peshwa court. His disciples in many different branches of learning dominated the post-Peshwa Sanskrit tradition in Pune, including the famous Bhāskaraśāstrī Abhyankar and his lineage represented in Pune by Vāsudevaśāstrī Abhyankar and K.V. Abhyankar. Many prominent scholars of Sanskrit grammar in modern times, including the late Vāmanaśāstrī Bhāgavat and Shivaram Dattatreya Joshi (and their students like myself), belong to the lineage of Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte. Though Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte never officially served at the Peshwa court, he was the Adalat Shastri in Satara from 1818 to 1821 (S. Kulkarni 1995: 143).

It appears that Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte got involved in the so-called Grāmaṇyas “restrictions” on groups like the CKPs and Sonars who claimed to be Kṣatriyas and Brahmins respectively.<sup>13</sup> The Grāmaṇya of 1826 in

<sup>13</sup> There is not only a grammatical tradition linking Nilakaṇṭha Thatte to later pandits in

the case of the CKPs, as in previous Grāmaṇyas, involved the question of whether the CKPs could perform their religious rites according to the Vedic mantras. The CKPs claimed to be Kṣatriyas, and the Kṣatriyas, by tradition, had the right to perform sacrifice, to give charity, and to study the Vedas. The CKPs claimed, that as Kṣatriyas, they were entitled to these three rights. The Brahmins (or at least some of them) contested these claims, and argued that the great Paraśurāma of the epic period had killed off all Kṣatriyas twenty-one times, and hence there were no true Kṣatriyas left in the Kali age. Thus, all non-Brahmins, including the CKPs and the ruling Marathā kings, were Śūdras.

In 1825, Balwantrao Chitnis, the secretary of the Satara Raja, requested the Śaṅkarācārya of the Sankeshwar Math to resolve the question of the Kṣatriyahood of the CKPs. Without resolving the root question, the Śaṅkarācārya simply asserted that each caste should be allowed to continue with its own established tradition, and no change in this practice should be made. However, when the Śaṅkarācārya later traveled to Poona, the prominent local Brahmins persuaded him to revise his decision and to declare that the CKPs and the Sonars were no more than Śūdras. Among the leading Brahmins opposing the Kṣatriya status of the CKPs were Chintamanrao Patwardhan, the Chief of Sangli, and Balajeepant Natu, the former assistant to Grant Duff and Mountstuart Elphinstone. Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte was related to Balajeepant Natu. Natu's daughter was married to Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte's adoptive son, Nārāyaṇa Shastri Thatte. Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte's relationship with Balajeepant Natu may have obligated him to some extent to follow his line against the CKPs.<sup>14</sup> Sumitra Kulkarni (1995: 189) reports:

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Maharashtra, but some of these pandits, notably Vāsudeva Shastri Abhyankar, produced a very conservative response to social reforms in his *Dharmatattvanirṇaya*.

<sup>14</sup> "Narrain Shastree Thutey, a son-in-law of Ballajee Punt Nathoo's, who resides at Poonah, has had, through his father-in-law's interference, a perpetual wurshasun of 1250 Rupees per annum, conferred on him from the Sattara treasury." This is one of the charges against Balajeepant Natu, cf. *Case of Krushnajeet Sadasew Bhidey, the accuser of Lieutenant-Colonel Ovens, and Ballajee Punt Nathoo, of Bribery and Corruption at Sattara*, 1845, p. 24. London: Effingham Wilson, Royal Exchange (digitized by Google from the Bodleian Library, Oxford University). Nārāyaṇa Thatte was involved around 1840s in various disputes that revolved around the conversion to Christianity in Mumbai of a certain Seshadri, cf. Oturkar (1950). So it seems that the Thatte lineage has been deeply involved in these disputes. But clearly he was also regarded as a leading pandit in his own right. In his letter to K.M. Chatfield, Director of Public Instruction, dated 7th July, 1880, R.G. Bhandarkar says that he proposed to catalogue the book/manuscript collections of Gangadhar Shastri Datar and Narayana

The issue whether the Prabhus were the Kshatriyas or not was discussed for two years in a conference held at the Belbag in Poona. It is interesting to note that on this issue the Brahmin caste itself was divided into two groups. Raghavacharya Gajendragadkar, a well known learned pandit and 'Vajra-Taka' were of the opinion that the prabhus were the Kshatriyas. The opposite group was headed by Nilkanthashastri Thatte, a learned pandit and expert on Hindu Dharmashastra. He was a former judge of the Satara Court (Adalat) and was held in high esteem by all sections of the society. He did not subscribe to the view that the Prabhus belonged to the Kshatriya caste.

Wagle (1980 and 1982) has discussed in detail the daily oscillations during this debate and the narratives discussed by Wagle, with original sources documented by T.V. Gupte (1904 and 1912), K.T. Gupte (1919), and Thakare (1919), seem to suggest that Nilakantha Shastri Thatte went on changing his positions under pressures of various kind, though finally he comes across from these narratives as an arch opponent of the CKPs. Sumitra Kulkarni (1995: 190) also details another related dispute that arose around 1826:

The Gramanya between the Brahmins and the Marathas evolved out of the Prabhu Gramanya of 1826. The brahmins were not ready to accept the Chhatrapati of Satara and other maratha families as Kshatriyas. According to the brahmins, Parshuram eradicated the Kshatriyas twenty-one times and therefore no Kshatriyas were left on earth. So the present Marathas were Kunbis and not the Kshatriyas. The jagirdars of Satara in their letters addressed to Pratapsinha only as Chhatrapati and not Kshatriya Kulwantansa as we find in the original title of the founder of the Maratha power—Shivaji. We do find a reference in the Rojnishi of Raja Pratapsinha that he refused to reply to Chintamanrao Patwardhan of Sangli as he did not address him as Kshatriya Kulwantansa.

This dispute, briefly outlined here, resulted into a full blown dispute in subsequent times and spread to Kolhapur, Baroda, and Pune, and under the general title of "Vedokta Dispute," this conflict between the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas has been richly documented by Copland (1973), Wagle (1987), O'Hanlon (1983 and 1985) and Pawar (1985). It is not clear what role, if any, Nilakantha Shastri Thatte played in the wider dispute regarding

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Shastri Thatte, cf. *Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Library of the Deccan College*, 1884, p. 1. A.R. Kulkarni (2000: 198–199) reports that the French orientalist Charles D'Ochoa, during his visit to Poona in 1843–1844, made a listing of 491 books and manuscripts from the collection of Nilakantha Shastri Thatte.

the status of the Maratha Kṣatriyas, but his association with Chintamanrao Patwardhan of Sangli in the dispute against the status of the CKPs would suggest that he was ideologically inclined not to grant to Marathas the status of Kṣatriyas.<sup>15</sup> He was clearly not a lone villain, but represented the continuity of the majority Brahmin opinion that had developed during the period of Narayan Rao Peshwa, and reflected in the views of Ayyāshastri, who succeeded the well known Ramashastri Prabhune, as the Nyāyādhīśa at the late Peshwa court. The powerful Nana Phadnis, the Kārbhārī of the Peshwas during the last days of the Peshwa rule, was also of the same view.<sup>16</sup>

### *Kāyastha-parabhū-dharmādarśa* of Nilakaṇṭha Śāstrī Thatte

I want to briefly discuss the only surviving Sanskrit text attributed explicitly to Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte, namely the *Kāyastha-parabhū-dharmādarśa*, available in a manuscript in the Limaye Collection of manuscripts at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Poona. The manuscript is dated to 1827 and the work appears to have been composed in the heat of the CKP dispute in Pune in which Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte was deeply involved. In relation to this work, P.K. Gode (1956: 76) makes the following comment:

The adopted son of Nilakaṇṭha Sūri Thatte was married to the daughter (Tai) of Sardar Bālājī Nārāyaṇa Nātū in AD 1818. (*Vide* p. 123 of *Thatte Kula-Vṛttānta*, Poona, 1936). This Sardar Bālājīpant Nātū was associated with the *Kāyastha Prabhu* dispute of Śaka 1745 (= AD 1823). It is possible to suppose that Nilakaṇṭha Sūri composed his *Kāyastha-parabhū-dharmādarśa* in connection with the dispute of 1823 AD to vindicate his relative's (Bālājīpant's)

<sup>15</sup> Nilakaṇṭha Thatte's role in decisions relating to suttee and abortion is discussed by A.R. Kulkarni (1996: 189) and Wagle (1998: 53–57). Sumitra Kulkarni (1995: 187) reports that the widow of Dajeeba Lagu was prevented from becoming suttee by Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte among others.

<sup>16</sup> Nayak (1877) provides important local narratives explaining some of the reasons why the fights between the Prabhus (CKP as well as Pathare/Pattanes) and the Chitpavan Brahmins may have reignited in the region of Konkan in the middle of the 18th century. The first reason Nayak offers is that the Prabhus were appointed as officers by the Portugese in areas like Vasai close to Mumbai, where they were required by the Portugese to force all Hindus including Brahmins to join in forced labor (Veth). The Brahmins and the Chitpavans in the region in particular held the Prabhus responsible for this. The second reason offered is that the Prabhus in the region of Mumbai built the Siddhivinayak Ganesh temple in Mumbai, and offered the priest-ship to Deshastha Brahmins, disregarding the claims of the local Chitpavan Brahmins. This apparently enraged the Konkan Brahmins to take their fights to local officials of the Peshwas.

position against the Kāyastha Prabhus. If this inference is correct the date of *Kāyastha-parabhū-dharmādarsa* must lie between AD 1823 and AD 1827, the date of the manuscript of this work.

The *Kāyastha-parabhū-dharmādarsa* of Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte<sup>17</sup> is not a serious Dharmasāstric contribution, but looks like a work of convenience. First he introduces only one type of Kāyastha, a mixed caste born from the union of a Māhiṣya woman and a Vaideha man. The Māhiṣya woman herself is the progeny of a mixed Kṣatriya+Vaiśya parentage, and the Vaideha man is also the progeny of a Vaiśya man and a Brahmin woman. Thus, the Kāyastha is a second generation mixed progeny. Such a progeny cannot be Kṣatriya. Then he cites Kamalākara (author of the well known *Śūdrakamālākara*)<sup>18</sup> and says that according to Kamalākara, there are two more types of Kāyasthas, namely the Citragupta Kāyasthas and the Cāndrasenīya Kāyasthas. This is somewhat similar to what Gāgābhaṭṭa reports in his *Kāyasthadharmadīpa*. However, citing some of the same narratives as Gāgābhaṭṭa, Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte interprets the line *rāmājñayā sa dālbyena kṣatradharmād bahiṣkṛtaḥ* to mean that, to save the life of the child of the queen of Candrasena, Dālbya categorically made him un-Kṣatriya. He removed his Kṣatriyadharmā, namely his Kṣatriyahood. This is a conclusion different from that of Gāgābhaṭṭa, who argued that the

<sup>17</sup>) Another work, *Parabhujātiniṛṇaya* (BORI mss 567/1883–1884), gives a fascinating account of the fights of CKPs with Brahmins, but the text seems to refer to the disputes covering the period of Sambhaji and Rajaram, and refers to a nirṇaya made by Keśava Paṇḍita.

<sup>18</sup>) Interestingly, one may note that the editors of the 1861 Bombay edition of Kamalākara-bhaṭṭa's *Śūdrakamālākara*, namely, Ganesh Bapuji Malvankar and Vishnu Bapuji Bapat explicitly say in the preface that their edition was based on a manuscript of this work that came from the collection of Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte. So, it is looks like Nilakaṇṭha used Kamalākara's work against that of Gāgābhaṭṭa. Kamalākara also cites the story of the son of Citrasena's queen being saved by Dālbya from being killed by Paraśurāma, but seems to have taken the line *rāmājñayā sa dālbyena kṣatradharmād bahiṣkṛtaḥ* to mean that the child was deprived of his Kṣatriyatva (*Śūdrakamālākara*, folios 89–90). The other point of interest seen in the *Śūdrakamālākara* is that it discusses the question of the existence of Kṣatriyas in the Kali age. It cites the famous verse saying that there are only two Varṇas in the Kali age. However, it cites other verses saying that there are Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas in the seed form even in the Kali age, and yet they have lost their dharma and have been reduced to the status of Śūdras (cf. *pracchannarūpāḥ svakarmabhraṣṭāḥ kṣatriyā vaiśyāś ca santy eva kvacid ity asmatpitṛcaranāḥ*, *Śūdrakamālākara*, folios 93–94). It would appear that Gāgābhaṭṭa accepted the first argument about the seed-presence of the Kṣatriyas in the Kali age, and tried to remedy their loss of dharma with purificatory *vrātya-stoma* rite. On these points, Nāgeśabhaṭṭa differed from Gāgābhaṭṭa, and Nāgeśabhaṭṭa's views continued to influence his successors like Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte.



child of the queen of Candrasena was a born Kṣatriya, but was prohibited from carrying out specifically Kṣatriya duties, but that did not take away his essential Kṣatriyahood, and hence he was entitled to a form of Upanayana. Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte's opinions were not limited to his own views, they were in line with the arguments offered by large numbers of Brahmins from Satara, Vai and Pune, as seen from the documents (P.N. Patwardhan 1912), and hence collectively they represented a socially and politically powerful force against the defenders of the rights of the CKPs.

### Tracing the Lineage of Nilakaṇṭha Śāstrī Thatte to Nāgeśabhaṭṭa & Vaidyanātha

While the role Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte played in disputes against the status of the CKPs and Sonars is richly documented by Wagle and others, there is another side to his personality that has largely remained untouched in the available research. Earlier I have noted the scholarly lineage of Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte going back to Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa. Nilakaṇṭha Shastri went to Banaras, with the support of the Peshwa court, and studied with Nāgeśabhaṭṭa's disciple Vaidyanātha Pāyagunḍe. Nāgeśa, Vaidyanātha, and Vaidyanātha's son Bālabhaṭṭa, besides being great grammarians also wrote on many other Śāstras, including Dharmaśāstra. The anti-CKP views of Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte may have a far longer ancestry in the views of Nāgeśabhaṭṭa, as well as in the views of Gāgābhaṭṭa's powerful uncle, Kamalākarabhaṭṭa. The most extensive argumentation against admitting the presence of pure Kṣatriyas in the Kali age, and the ineligibility of the impure Kṣatriya to purify themselves by undergoing an expiatory rite is offered in two Nirṇaya texts that are attributed to Nāgeśabhaṭṭa: *Vrātyatā-prāyaścittanirṇaya* (in *Mahā-* and *Laghu-* versions), while a counter argument supporting the expiatory rights to purify the impure Kṣatriyas is offered in the text of *Vrātyatāśuddhisamgraha* produced by the pandits at the court of Jayasimha in Rajasthan. A convenient summary of the main arguments is provided by the editor of these texts, Nārāyaṇaśāstrī Khiste, in his preface (pp. 1–2, translated from Sanskrit):

The two versions of the *Vrātyatāprāyaścittanirṇaya* (*Mahān* and *Laghu*), even without any reference to the name of their author, are indubitably the works of Nāgeśabhaṭṭa, since he is well known to have produced such smaller and larger [*Laghu* and *Bṛhat*] versions of his texts. The *Vrātyatāśuddhisamgraha* is composed by a group of pandits commissioned by Jayasimha. Both the versions of the *Vrātyatāprāyaścittanirṇaya* begin with the question of the eligibil-

ity for Upanayana in the Kali age for those who know that no Upanayana was performed for ten generations in their family, and those for whom no earlier Upanayana is remembered either, and concludes that for such Kṣatriyas (only in name), there can be no Upanayana rite. This is clearly stated by Nāgeśa: “From the birth of Parikṣit to the coronation of Nanda, these were the first fifteen hundred years of the Kali age, and there were genuine Kṣatriyas on earth only for this duration. On the basis of this statement in the Viṣṇupurāṇa, the absence of genuine Kṣatriyas, worthy of Upanayana, in the rest of the Kali age is indicated.” The other work, the *Vrātyatāśuddhisamgraha*, produced by (a group of) many scholars, determined with various arguments the existence of the Kṣatriyas and their eligibility for Upanayana even in the Kali age. ... We (the editor) do not offer any opinion of our own. We have presented both of these sides in front of the scholars, and they can choose whichever they like depending upon acceptable grounds.

While the editor claims neutrality in this debate, in the subsequent portion of the preface (ibid. p. 2), he claims that those pandits who were dependent upon Jayasimha for their livelihood produced the *Vrātyatāśuddhisamgraha*, having forgotten the true intent of the ancient Smṛtis under the influence of wealth. On the other hand, wealth did not mean anything to Nāgeśabhaṭṭa, whose sole concern was to protect the proper domain of the Śāstras, and he produced the *Vrātyatāśuddhicittanirṇaya*, following solely the path of the Śāstras, and disregarding the pressure from Jayasimha. “This is what we have heard from the older generations of Banaras.” Nārāyaṇaśāstri Khiste’s statements in the preface show us how Nāgeśabhaṭṭa’s views were considered authoritative by the Maharashtrian Brahmins of Banaras, even after more than a century. We should note again that Nārāyaṇa Shastri Thatte was a direct disciple of Vaidyanātha Pāyagunḍe, who was a direct disciple of Nāgeśabhaṭṭa, and hence the influence of Nāgeśabhaṭṭa’s views on the views of Nārāyaṇa Shastri Thatte cannot be underestimated. From the time of Shivaji to Pratapasinha of Satara, the constant effort of the Maratha lineages was to establish their ancestry from the Rajput lineages of Rajasthan, and this was assumed to be a sufficient proof of Kṣatriyahood. On the other hand, Nāgeśabhaṭṭa’s rejection of the right of Upanayana to Rajputs like Jayasimha of Jaipur and his blanket rejection of Upanayana to anyone other than a Brahmin in the Kali age represented a far extreme end of the Dharmaśāstric spectrum.<sup>19</sup> But even in this extreme view, Nāgeśabhaṭṭa was

<sup>19</sup> P.V. Kane (1974: 381 ff.) cites the *Vrātyatāśuddhicittanirṇaya* and considers it as the work of Nāgeśabhaṭṭa. Kane remarks on the extremity of Nāgeśabhaṭṭa’s opinion: “It must be stated that such views, though held by some rigidly orthodox writers of extreme views, were

not alone. One has only to remember how the *Sahyādrīkhaṇḍa* narrative describes the curse of Paraśurāma upon the ‘wicked’ Chitpavan Brahmins. One element of this curse is that they will serve Śūdras. This obviously looks like a reference to the Chitpavan Brahmins serving as Peshwas under the descendants of Shivaji. The fact that this narrative only curses Chitpavan Brahmins in this fashion, while Deśastha Brahmins were already among the ministers of Shivaji, probably points to the period of the Peshwas for its composition, when the Chitpavan Brahmins begin to emerge as powerful players in Maratha history. So the author of the *Sahyādrīkhaṇḍa*, or of this section of it, whoever he was, regarded the Maratha rulers as Śūdras, even while he was expressing a curse upon the Chitpavan Brahmins.<sup>20</sup>

### Vaidyanātha Pāyagunḍe on Kṣatriyas in the Kali Age

What can we say about the views of Nārāyaṇa Shastri Thatte’s direct teacher, Vaidyanātha Pāyagunḍe? Here we get some indications from Vaidyanātha’s commentary *Prabhā* on Bhaṭṭoji Dikṣita’s *Śabdakaustubha*. On the passage *brāhmaṇena niṣkāraṇo dharmah ṣaḍaṅgo vedo ’dhyeyo jñeyaś ca* from the *Mahābhāṣya* discussed in the *Śabdakaustubha* [Pt. I, p. 10], Vaidyanātha’s commentary *Prabhā* reads: *atra brāhmaṇenety uktyā ’nyayor evam adhyayanam kāmīyam eveti sūcitam iti kaścit tan na smṛtyantaravirodhāpatteh / tasmāt traivarnīkopalakṣaṇam tat / ... yad vā kalau kṣatriyaviśor abhāvāt tathoktam* [BORI manuscript 62/1866–1868, Folio 38a].<sup>21</sup> Here, two alternative

not shared by most writers.” Kane cites contrary opinions, though he seems to discount the historically attested strength of the views held by Nāgeśa and manifested during the Peshwa period.

<sup>20</sup> For an analysis of the *Sahyādrīkhaṇḍa* and its historical context, see Deshpande (2002).

<sup>21</sup> One sees the same views expressed in almost identical words in Vaidyanātha’s commentary *Chāyā* on Nāgeśabhaṭṭa’s *Uddyota* on Kaiyaṭa’s *Pradīpa* on Patañjali’s *Mahābhāṣya* (*Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣya*, Vol. I., p. 22). Here, Vaidyanātha cites an unnamed Smṛti text: *kalau na kṣatriyāḥ santi kalau no vaiśyajāṭayāḥ / brāhmaṇāś caiva śūdrāś ca kalau varṇadvayaṃ smṛtam* // . While Patañjali says that a Brahmin should study the Veda, the commentators try to figure out the implications of this statements. The *Ratnaprakāśa* of Śivarāmeṇḍrasarasvatī (*Mahābhāṣya-Pradīpa-Vyākhyānāni*, Adhyāya 1, Pāda 1 Āhnika 1–4, p. 35) says that Patañjali’s words indicate that the study of the Veda is not obligatory for the Kṣatriyas and the Vaiśyas. This view is cited by Nāgeśa in his *Uddyota* (*Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣya*, Vol. I., p. 22). Commenting on this, Vaidyanātha first says that this view is not to his liking, since it contradicts other Smṛtis that prescribe that all the three higher Varṇas must study the Veda (*atrārucibijam tayor nityādhyayanavidhāyakasmṛtyantarādivirodhāpattir iti / tasmād brāhmaṇapadaṃ traivarnīkopalakṣaṇam iti bodhyam*). However, Vaidyanātha finally says that in fact there are no Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas in the Kali age, and to suggest this Patañ-

explanations are presented. The first one says that someone has said that the passage “The Brahmin should study the Vedas” suggests that such a study is optional for the other two eligible Varṇas, namely the Kṣatriyas and the Vaiśyas. But such a view is not tenable, because it conflicts with other Smṛtis. Therefore, the reference to the Brahmins is simply a pointer to the three higher Varṇas. After this initial interpretation, Vaidyanātha presents what appears to be his own understanding. It says that the original passage refers only to Brahmins studying the Vedas. This is because of the absence of the Kṣatriyas and the Vaiśyas in the Kali age. Bālabhāṭṭa, Vaidyanātha’s son, refers to the views of Nāgeśabhāṭṭa as well as his own father, and says that his father also composed a work titled *Kāyastha-nirṇaya*, which one can presume rejected the right of Upanayana to the Kāyasthas.<sup>22</sup>

### Moderate Views of Kamalākaraḥṭṭa

This is certainly a more categorical rejection of the presence of the Kṣatriyas in the Kali age, compared to what one finds in the *Śūdrakamalākara* of Kamalākaraḥṭṭa, who says that while pure Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas do not exist in the Kali age, there certainly are in some places Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas “hidden (unrecognizable?), fallen from their own religious duties” [*pracchannarūpāḥ svakarmabhraṣṭāḥ kṣatriyā vaiśyās ca santy eva kvacit ity asmat-pitṛcaranāḥ*, *Śūdrakamalākara*, folio 94]. Kamalākara not only asserts that such Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas do exist in the Kali age, he says that this is also the view of his revered father Rāmakṛṣṇa. Kamalākaraḥṭṭa, in his *Nirṇayasindhu*, says that Brahmins, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas, if they exceed the age-limits for their Upanayana, become Śūdras. Such a maximum age limit for a Brahmin is sixteen years. For a Kṣatriya it is twenty-two years, and for a Vaiśya it is twenty-four years [*Manuḥ—ā ṣoḍaśād brāhmaṇasya sāvitṛ nātivartate / ā dvāviṃśāt kṣatrabandhor ā caturviṃśater viśaḥ // Jyotirni-*

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jali says that (only) Brahmins should study the Veda (*vastutas tu kalau kṣatriyavaiśyayor abhāvaṃ sūcayitum tathoktam iti yathāśrutam eva tat sādhu*). In his footnote on this passage in the *Chāyā*, the editor of the *Mahābhāṣya*, Śivadatta Kudāla says that there is no reason to imagine that Patañjali is making a reference to the Kali-yuga, and hence it is appropriate to assume that his reference to Brahmins is inclusive of the Kṣatriyas and the Vaiśyas. These passages are also discussed by C.V. Vaidya (1923: 96–97).

<sup>22)</sup> P.V. Kane (1975: 971) cites Bālabhāṭṭa on the views of his father, Vaidyanātha, on the question of Kṣatriyas in the Kali age: *tathā ugrādirūpakṣatriyasattve ’pi teṣāṃ na kṣatriyatvaṃ kim tu śūdratvaṃ eveti gurucaraṇakṛtavrātyaprāyaścittanirṇaye spaṣṭam / tata eva bodhyam / sphuṭikṛtaṃ caitat pitṛcaranāḥ kāyasthanirṇaye*.

*bandhe—agrajā bāhuajā vaiśyāḥ svāvadher ūrdhvam abdataḥ / akr̥topanayāḥ sarve vṛṣalā eva te smṛtāḥ* //, *Nirṇayasindhu*, p. 262]. However, Kamalākara's grandfather, and Gāgābhaṭṭa's great grand-father, Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa, in his work *Dharmaprayṛtti*, refers to those Brahmins, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas who exceed the maximum age limit allotted for their Upanayana, and says that they fall to Śūdra-hood and are excluded from all religious rites, UNLESS THEY PERFORM THE EXPIATORY RITE OF VRĀTYASTOMA [*ata ūrdhvam patanty ete sarvadharmabahiṣkṛtāḥ / sāvitṛipatitā vrātyā vrātyastomād ṛte kratoh*, folio 51; *sāvitṛi patitā yasya daśa varṣāṇi pañca vā / saśikhaṃ vapanam kṛtvā vrataṃ kuryāt samāhitāḥ // ekaviṃśatirātram ca pibet prasṛtiyāvakaṃ / bhojayec ca haviṣyānnaṃ brāhmaṇān sapta pañca ca / tato yāvakaśuddhasya tasyopanayanam smṛtam // etad upanayanasy paramakālāt pūrvakāle jñeyam / ata ūrdhvam vrātyastomah vrātyastomād ṛte kṛte nivacanāt*, Folio 145].<sup>23</sup> What happens to those who have not had the Upanayana for many generations? This is the true point of departure. Gāgābhaṭṭa, taking cues from the works of his great grand father Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa, and his uncle Kamalākara-bhaṭṭa, offered expiation for such individuals. Seen in the context of the views of Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa and Kamalākara-bhaṭṭa, Gāgābhaṭṭa's further step does not appear to be excessively transgressive.

On the other hand, while admitting the presence of such “fallen” Kṣatriyas in the Kali age, Nāgeśabhaṭṭa has categorically rejected their right to expiation and restoration to purity and attaining the right to Upanayana. It would appear that Vaidyanātha is even more categorical: There are no Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas in the Kali age [*kalau kṣatriya-viśor abhāvāt*]. Now we can get a better sense of where Nilakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte may have derived his resolute opposition to admitting the Kṣatriyahood of the CKPs and their right to Upanayana. He directly inherited such a view from Nāgeśabhaṭṭa and Vaidyanātha, and then such a view was further encouraged by his association with Chintamanrao Patwardhan and Balajee Pant Natu, among others.

<sup>23</sup> The same expiation rites are prescribed for exceeding the age of Upanayana in the *Dharmasindhusāra* quoted in a footnote on the *Nirṇayasindhu* of Kamalākara (p. 262): *vṛṣalā eveti / na cet prāyaścittam anuṣṭhantitī śeṣaḥ // ata ūrdhvam patanty ete sarvadharmabahiṣkṛtāḥ // sāvitṛipatitā vrātyā vrātyastomād ṛte ṛtor iti yājñavalkya-vacanāt / āśodaśād ity atra garbhādih samkhyā / tathā ca janmataḥ pañcadaśavarṣa-paryantam viprasya na viśeṣataḥ prāyaścittam / śodaśavarṣe saśikhavapanam kṛtvā eka-viṃśatirātram yāvakaśanam ante dvādaśabrāhmaṇabhojanam iti prāyaścittam / sapta-daśādivarṣeṣu kṛcchratrayādiprāyaścittapūrvakam upanayanam bodhyam / iti dharmasindhusāram* / The opinion of Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa's *Dharmaprayṛtti* is echoed verbatim by Anantadeva in his *Samskārakaustubha* (pp. 114–115, lithographic edition, Bombay, 1861). Anantadeva was a close associate of Gāgābhaṭṭa in making decisions regarding the CKPs and Kṣatriyas. Also see footnote 3.

### Rājā: in the Absence of Kṣatriyas?

It would be interesting to see how the Brahmins who rejected the existence of the pure Kṣatriyas and their eligibility to Upanayana and coronation justified the need to serve such kings in the role of ministers and advisors. Contradictory as it may appear, such indeed is the explicit approach of a number of Brahmin authorities on the Dharmaśāstra in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. First, let me refer to Bālabhāṭṭa Pāyagunḍe, the son of Vaidyanātha Pāyagunḍe, and contemporary of Nīlakaṇṭha Śaṣtri Thatte. He is the author of the famous commentary *Bālabhāṭṭi* on the *Mitākṣarā* of Viṣṇūśvara on the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti*. Commenting on a quote from Manu, “A king desirous of taking care of the legal affairs along with Veda-knowing Brahmins and ministers should enter the court” [*vyavahārān didṛkṣus tu brāhmaṇaiḥ saha pārthivaiḥ / mantrajñair mantribhiḥ sārddham vinitaḥ praviśet sabhām*], the *Bālabhāṭṭi* of Bālabhāṭṭa Pāyagunḍe [p. 5] says: *pārthivaiḥ prthivīpatiḥ kṣatriyād anyah api* “The word ‘king’ refers to the ruler of the kingdom, even someone other than a Kṣatriya.” While Bālabhāṭṭa does not categorically reject the presence of the Kṣatriyas in the Kali age, he is explicitly admitting that non-Kṣatriyas can also become *de facto* kings, and in their capacity of being kings, they should be assisted by the Brahmins. Bālabhāṭṭa was not alone in holding this view. Kamalākaraḥṭṭa’s cousin Nīlakaṇṭha, the author of *Vyavahāramayūkha* explains the word *nṛpa* “king” [*Vyavahāramayūkha*, p. 2] in wording reminding us of Bālabhāṭṭa: *nṛpaḥ prajāpālānādhikṛto yaḥ kaścit, na kṣatriya eva* “The word *nṛpa* ‘king’ refers to whoever is in charge of protecting the people, and is not restricted to a Kṣatriya.” Similar non-Kṣatriya interpretations of the word *rājā* are found elsewhere in the Dharmaśāstra literature [*Dharmakośa*, Vol. IV, Pt. II, pp. 780 ff.; P.V. Kane 1973: 38–40].

On the other hand, we must contrast Gāgābhāṭṭa’s views on the same passages. These are found in his *Dinakaroddyota Vyavahārakāṇḍa* [manuscript 37/1866–1868 at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, in Pune]. Citing the same verse of Manu: *vyavahārān didṛkṣus tu brāhmaṇaiḥ saha pārthivaiḥ / mantrajñair mantribhiḥ caiva vinitaḥ praviśet sabhām //*, Gāgābhāṭṭa says: “Only a properly consecrated king is entitled to look after the business of justice (*vyavahāra*). ... Even though the word *rāja* refers to a particular Jāti, and in Dharmaśāstric passages, the word *rāja* often comes without any further specification, in those passages the word *rāja* refers to a Kṣatriya who is properly consecrated, since only such a consecrated Kṣatriya is entitled to look after justice” [*vyavahāradarśane*

*cābhiṣiktasya rājño 'dhikārah / rājābhiṣekasamyukto brāhmaṇo vā bahusrutah / dharmāsanagataḥ paśyed vyavahārān anulbaṇam iti prājāpatyukteḥ / ... yadyapi rājapadam jātivāci / rājñā sabhāsadaḥ kāryāḥ ityādi bahuṣu vacaneṣu kevalarājaśravaṇam ca / tathāpi tatra rājapadam abhiṣiktakṣatriyaparam tad-adhikārāt /*, *Dinakaroddyota*, folios 7a–8].<sup>24</sup> We don't know at this point when this work was composed in relation to Gāgābhaṭṭa's role at the court of Shivaji. However, it clearly expresses his view that only a properly consecrated Kṣatriya is entitled to carry out the task of delivering justice. If this was his view, then one can assume that while rendering Dharmaśāstric decisions for Shivaji, beginning in 1664 (cf. *Śyēnavijātidharmanirṇaya*) and continuing right upto 1674 (cf. *Kāyasthadharmadīpa*), Gāgābhaṭṭa was getting anxious about the proper Dharmaśāstric authority of Shivaji. The evidence of the *Śyēnavijātidharmanirṇaya* clearly shows that Gāgābhaṭṭa, already since 1664, regarded Shahaji and Shivaji as born in a "pure royal family" (*vimala-rāja-kula*) and as a *de facto* Rājā. Sabhāsad Bakhar reports that it was Gāgābhaṭṭa who suggested to Shivaji the idea of royal consecration, and this may indeed be a strong historical possibility. According to Sabhasad (pp. 78) Gāgābhaṭṭa said that in his opinion, the Muslim kings sat on their throne and ruled with a royal umbrella. Shivaji on the other hand, who had defeated four sultans, had seventy-five thousand troops and had forts, had no throne. He stated that the Maratha Raja should become a Chattrapati "holder of the umbrella."<sup>25</sup> Given his own Dharmaśāstric views, Gāgābhaṭṭa was most likely as anxious about having Shivaji properly consecrated, as Shivaji himself may have been about his own consecration.

<sup>24</sup> The Mackenzie Collection contains a manuscript of Gāgābhaṭṭa's work titled *Śūdroddyota*, Wilson (1828, p. 35). However, I have not yet been able to consult the contents of this manuscript. Wilson's catalogue of the Mackenzie Collection describes the contents of the manuscript as: "The rites and observances proper for the Śūdra caste by Gaga Bhata of Maharashtra." This description would place this work in the same category as the *Śūdrakamalākara* of Kamalākarabhaṭṭa and the *Śūdrācāraśiromaṇi* of Śeṣakṛṣṇa. It seems quite clear that Gāgābhaṭṭa was no modern reformist, out to abolish the caste system, in the image of Jotiba Phule or B.R. Ambedkar. The dispute was not over the legitimacy of the caste system as such, but about whether the traditional Dharmaśāstra could be tweaked to find just enough space to recognize a *de facto* Rājā as a legitimate Kṣatriya.

<sup>25</sup> *bhaṭ gosāvi yānce matem, musalmān pādśahā takṭi basavūn, chatra dharūn, pātasāhī karitāt āni śivājirāje yānnimhī cār pātasāhī dabāvilyā āni pāūn lākh ghodā laṣkar gaḍ koṭ asem asatām tyāms takṭa nāhim. yākaritām marbāthā rājā chatrapati vḥāvā asem cittānt āñilem*. Sabhāsad Bakhar, p. 78. For an analysis of the multiple accounts and explanations for Shivaji's coronation, see: Rajeev Raghavan (2007).

On the other hand, the *Mayūkha* of Nīlakaṇṭha was treated as an authoritative text on Dharmaśāstric decisions during the late Peshwa period, and continued to be treated as such during the early British rule. It's teaching was supported by the British rulers in the British supported Poona Sanskrit Pāṭhaśālā that opened in Pune after 1818. Many of the Sanskrit pandits who were appointed as teachers at this Pāṭhaśālā, including the principal Rāghavācārya, were students of Nīlakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte, and through this Pāṭhaśālā, the influence of conservative Dharmaśāstric views continued to hold sway among the Poona Brahmins, even after the fall of the Peshwa. The role of Nīlakaṇṭha Shastri Thatte can be better understood within such a fuller historical context.

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